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OBSTACLE OR OPPORTUNITY:

Journeys in the *Odyssey*

An Honors Senior Project

by

Heather Kaschmitter

June 1999

They bent to their rowing, and with their oars tossed
 up the sea spray,
 and upon the eyes of Odysseus there fell a sleep,
 gentle,
 the sweetest kind of sleep with no awakening, most
 like
 death; while the ship, as in a field four stallions
 drawing
 a chariot all break together at the stroke of the
 whiplash,
 and lifting high their feet lightly beat out their
 path, so
 the stern of this ship would lift and the creaming
 wave behind her
 boiled amain in the thunderous crash of the sea. She
 ran on
 very steady and never wavering; even the falcon,
 that hawk that flies lightest of winged creatures,
 could not have paced her
 so lightly did she run on her way and cut through the
 sea's waves.
 She carried a man with a mind like the gods for
 counsel, one whose
 spirit up to this time had endured much, suffering
 many
 pains: the wars of men, hard crossing of the big
 waters;
 but now he slept still, oblivious of all he had
 suffered. (Lattimore, XIII. 78-92)

The final leg of Odysseus' journey home occurs nearly halfway through the poem, serving as a transitional point. Odysseus, having related his adventures to the Phaeacians, can move on from them. It is Athena who guided Odysseus, still trembling from all he has experienced, to the palace of King Alcinoös in Scheria. The goddess knew that the healing process would begin there.

In writing of the sadness, rage, and tears that Odysseus displays at a banquet given for him by Alcinoos, Homer makes some of the initial "observations as to the effects of combat on men," (Schwartz, 26) which we might now label as Post Traumatic

Stress Disorder. (It should be noted that this is strictly a 20th century term.) To compliment this idea, the Phaeacians serve almost as counselors for Odysseus, providing a secure community in which Odysseus can release all of his pent-up experiences. Scheria is the midway point in his journey; it is between the supernatural and the human. Set in Edenic surroundings, it represents the ideal human civilization. It is here that he relates his adventures of the past decade, and the first time that we as readers hear the tale.

His progression--from the wisdom mentioned as he sleeps to a "waking ignorance of his whereabouts" (Clay, 191) (compliments of Athena's mist)--is crucial. It is not irrelevant that Odysseus is asleep when he arrives home, although it is ironic; one usually is alert or aware when awake and unaware when asleep. It is strange that Odysseus sleeps through this part of his homecoming, since he has looked forward to it for two decades. But not all is what it appears to be in the *Odyssey*; sleep is a kind of transition through which he must pass, with Athena as his guide. As he sleeps, his past sufferings become a dream, a memory. In turn, when he wakes on Ithaca, he will be prepared to face the future.

Although Odysseus *sees* Ithaca, he cannot *recognize* it--"seeing is not the equivalent of knowing." (Clay, 191) The mist Athena creates to hide Ithaca's identity from Odysseus makes an opportunity for disguising Odysseus so that no one recognizes him until he has had his revenge, and also allows her to explain to him what he can expect at home. (192)

It is of the greatest importance that Athena, "the cleverest of the gods," and Odysseus, "the wiliest of mortals," meet face to face (glorious Athena, undisguised) for

the first time on Ithaca for a duel of wits. (188) It reveals the especially close relationship between Athena and Odysseus. Simply knowing she is present will allay doubts he may have about the future, and this will strengthen any weaknesses he may have once at home. Most of all, Athena's presence bridges the gap between "the wandering adventures of the past and the reestablishment of Odysseus on Ithaca." (190) Thus far, she has done everything in her power to protect him, and she now disguises him from those who may harm him. This allows him time to get a feel for the situation at home and to plot his revenge

After being gone for twenty years, any man would be eager to come home. But when Odysseus returns home to Ithaca, he is still as cautious as ever. His self-control and denial of immediate impulse had been useful in protecting him from harm in the past, and he seems to know instinctively that one cannot jump into a homecoming, especially after such a great deal of time. Ostensibly, he must wait because the conditions at home may have evolved radically since his departure, but this wait also allows an opportunity for the healing process to occur, a process which should not be rushed. In a war, soldiers give up a part of their hearts for their causes, their societies, and their families. This kind of sacrifice "must be honored and dealt with so [a warrior] can return to the work of the real world without bringing glory and madness within him." (Heidlebaugh in Red Eagle, x) In other words, a period of adjustment and quiet is needed. Athena herself tells Odysseus that there is more that he must endure at home, and stresses the need for the continuation of patience and secrecy. (Clay, 199-200)

The first hint of the (necessary) hardship involved in the homecoming process comes near the beginning of the poem, when Calypso (her name means "the concealer" in

Greek) receives a message from Zeus delivered by Hermes demanding the release of Odysseus. For seven years she has detained him by constraint (IV. 557-58) on her island; that is enough. But there is a catch; Zeus decrees that Odysseus' journey home is to be undertaken with neither mortal nor immortal help, on a ship that Odysseus must himself construct. Calypso's covering "which hides Odysseus away from the world he knows and that knows him is to be lifted only gradually and under hardship." (Thornton, 16-17) Odysseus' former perceptions of reality and the world are obscured or changed by the mists of new knowledge that may either confuse or enlighten him. Just as Calypso's mist prevents his homecoming, Athena's mist protects him when he does come home.

Mists, divine or otherwise, play both literal and metaphorical roles throughout the whole poem. From a postmodernist perspective, Homer spends a great deal of time constructing and deconstructing binaries of image and reality. Simply put, nothing is what it seems. Every place that his journey takes him, every being that he meets, forces him constantly to reevaluate human-made categories such as *nature* and *culture*. Everything Odysseus comes into contact with is scrutinized (Thalmann, 72) and reinterpreted. Odysseus encounters all types of beings and places, ranging from the divine or superhuman to human to inhuman monsters. For example, where would Polyphemos, the Cyclops, be placed--in the *nature* category or the *culture* category? Polyphemos is less than human in many respects, but more human than animal in others. His cannibalism makes him seem animal-like, but he can speak like a person. He does have an intellect, but is outwitted by the clever Odysseus. Odysseus--as well as the reader--swims in the confused gray areas that color many of his travels. With this kind of

inconsistency and instability, Odysseus' inherent skepticism and caution become increasingly indispensable skills necessary for survival.

Already in the fact of Odysseus' survival, there is ample evidence supporting the idea that Odysseus has the qualities that make him a different kind of hero than, say, Achilles in the *Iliad*. Achilles "gained honor and fame at the cost of an early though glorious death in battle. The *Odyssey*, by contrast, is a poem of survival." (Thalmann, 11) It praises more than physical prowess.

Odysseus has many nicknames in the poem that describe him as possessing the qualities of a hero: "man of many ways" (I. 1) and "godlike" (I. 21). Odysseus is known for being "wily" and resourceful as well. A hero is usually defined as having "distinguished courage or ability", "noble qualities", or "godlike prowess," and many aspects of this dictionary definition apply to Odysseus.

It is not a given set of physical characteristics that makes up Odysseus' real identity, but a style of action. (Dimock, 210) Nowhere in Webster's definition are physical characteristics or strength mentioned; nor, in Homer's own definition (which will be discussed later), do we find that physical strength is the only asset a hero has. Rather, he is often defined in terms of personal relationships. "[Odysseus] is the only person capable of filling the role of Telemachos' father, husband of Penelope," and lord of Ithaca. (Dimock, 210) The suitors, no matter how highly they may think of themselves, are unfit replacements for Odysseus; they could never fill any of these positions as well as he could.

Odysseus is clever enough to know that he must control his immediate impulse to run home shouting with joy. Returning to Ithaca has been his goal for over a decade, and

he wants to make *absolutely sure* that Ithaca is indeed where he has landed, and that he will still be welcome there. The self-control or "practical reason" (Thornton, 80-81) Odysseus possesses that makes him capable of keeping his identity a secret is not only admirable, it seems nearly super-human. When he comes home to Ithaca after twenty years of absence, he resists the desire to reveal his feelings, even when he sees his son (whom he last saw as an infant) being welcomed (by others he hasn't seen for two decades). Odysseus knows that the suitors are watching and will readily kill him. Athena approves of Odysseus' prudence and "hard-won instinct to test the household." (Finley, 145) Odysseus doesn't know if anyone is still faithful to him as a king, a husband, a father (this last is settled in Book XVI). He needs to discover this, and bide his time while planning his revenge and his reestablishment of his rule.

Unlike Agamemnon, who, in the main subplot of the *Odyssey*, rushes home from the war, not suspecting the infidelity of his wife, Odysseus is "not the kind of man to run home impulsively without first ascertaining what kind of welcome he might expect." (Clay, 205) His guard down, Agamemnon was an easy target for his wife and her lover, Aegisthus, who murdered him upon his return. Odysseus visits the ghost of Agamemnon in the land of the dead. Agamemnon warns Odysseus to be cautious on his return home, and to be especially on his guard concerning Penelope. However, he adds that Penelope is a virtuous wife and will not murder him. (XI. 440-46)

As Odysseus silently watches others greet Telemachos on his son's homecoming, readers infer Odysseus' suppressed yearnings to do the same. When Odysseus is finally able to greet his son, the relief from the suspense is all the greater. (Dimock, 207) It is Athena who presides over this climactic meeting of father and son. (209). She has been

instrumental throughout the entire plot in bringing father and son together so that they may at last defeat the suitors and restore order and decorum to the human society on Ithaca.

A Homeric hero has not only admirable interpersonal skills but a type of eloquence "that testifies to his inner qualities." (Thalmann, 39) Odysseus is well-known for this. Since Athena has veiled the area, he does not realize that he has finally reached Ithaca. (Thalmann, 97) When she reveals the truth of his location, he does not believe her. With cunning words he concocts a false story and identity, and attempts to deceive her. (98) He doesn't know that he is trying to fool Athena, the goddess of wisdom! However, she is pleased and lets him know in her mischevious tone that she admires his cleverness:

It would be a sharp one, and a stealthy one, who
would ever get past you
in any contriving; even if it were a god against
you.
You wretch, so
devious, never weary of tricks, then you would
not
even in your own country give over your ways
of deceiving
and your thievish tales. They are near to you in
your very nature.
But come, let us talk no more of this, for you
and I both know
sharp practice, since you are far the best of all
mortal
men for counsel and stories, and I among all the
divinities am famous for wit and sharpness; and
yet you never recognized
Pallas Athene, daughter of Zeus, the one who is
always
standing beside you and guarding you in every
endeavor. (XIII. 291-301)

Here Athena admires Odysseus' cleverness because his distrust of her is, ironically enough, the starting place of wisdom. (Dimock, 185) One never learns without asking questions, and Odysseus is ever-questioning. "He trusts his own judgment even in preference to Athena's word," (183), or Calypso's. (At first Odysseus does not believe Calypso when she sets him free at Zeus's orders in Book V.) This is evidenced in the scene mentioned above. It takes more than words to make Odysseus a believer.

In the *Odyssey*, Athena is held responsible for the good or bad luck that allows Odysseus not only to survive, but succeed. (Dimock, 183) Credit given to Athena for good or bad fortune, of course, depends on whose point of view the reader consults. Odysseus, in narrating his adventures to the Phaeacians, does not directly credit Athena with his survival. Consider the episode with Polyphemos. Odysseus plots to kill the Cyclops in his sleep, but has *second thoughts*, or *foresight*. He realizes that "we too would have perished away in sheer destruction, seeing that our hands could never have pushed from the lofty gate of the cave the ponderous boulder he had propped there." (IX. 303-05) Nowhere is Athena mentioned as being responsible for this lucky foresight; nor is she held responsible for the thought itself. But from Homer's point of view as omniscient narrator, Odysseus' inner quality of second-guessing himself, or wisdom, is a gift from Athena. Put another way, Athena is an externalized manifestation of Odysseus' inner qualities. The ancient Greeks often gave credit to a particular god or goddess if a human being seemed to have a particularly strong body or above-average intellect, and Homer's writings demonstrate this in the clearest and most beautiful way.

Consider the episode in Book V where Odysseus barely avoids the rocks as the stormy sea pushes him toward the land of the Phaeacians:

Now the great sea covered him over,
and Odysseus would have perished...
had not the gray-eyed goddess Athene given him
forethought.
He got clear of the surf, where it sucks against the
land, and swam on
along, looking always toward the shore in the hope
of finding
beaches that slanted against the waves or harbors for
shelter
from the sea... (V. 435-441)

Here Homer gives credit to Athena for the wisdom of Odysseus' actions. Homer tries to show his readers that without Athena, Odysseus would not be nearly so wise, and probably would not have survived the journey home. Odysseus is not the master of his fate. He has free will, but he owes his life and success to Athena. It is not as if Odysseus is an incompetent fool. But with Athena at his side, every action he performs is that much greater. (Dimock, 186)

A large part of Odysseus' self-control involves patience, and if Odysseus is one thing, he is patient. He has learned through the years that if he patiently waits, the answers to his prayers *will* come. He cannot control when the answer will come, or what it will be, but there is always an answer. Although Odysseus questions Athena's words when she tells him he has finally landed on Ithaca, he also seems to know when the time for questions has passed. He knows when it is time to make the crucial jump into action, a leap of faith, so to speak. Patience is instrumental in Odysseus' waiting for the right time to attack the suitors. But he has good reason to believe that he will not crash into a brick wall in the darkness of ignorance. He is guided by the light of wisdom that Athena provides.

In matters of faith, Odysseus and his son Telemachos are somewhat different. Throughout both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* there is no contract that the mortals have with the gods, who are often as fickle as mortals, if not more so. Sensing this, Telemachos doubts that the gods will support them in their final battle. (Thornton, 71) But Odysseus has learned over time to control his impatience and curiosity concerning what the gods have planned, and to wait until the time is right. He is convinced that the gods will not abandon their cause. Even in the *Iliad*, Odysseus is already experienced in dealing with the gods and goddesses. "He has both more faith and more reverence in relation to them than the younger man." (Thornton, 71) Odysseus shares this valuable wisdom and faith with his son. Homer makes it obvious that Telemachos, as a young hero and prospective heir, is *learning to be* faithful and reverent, especially toward Athena, who is so crucial to Telemachos' growth.

The way Athena assists Telemachos is very different from the way she assists Odysseus. Odysseus can manage quite well by himself for the most part; Athena just adds an extra push. With Telemachos, Athena is more like a guiding parent figure. While she actually appears to Odysseus undisguised, she appears to Telemachos disguised as mentoring figures that give him the direction and the confidence to carry out the plans that she has set for him. He moves from an ignorance of his own powers to enlightenment, but more by reflecting upon the words and actions of others than by his own efforts. (Finley, 139) Telemachos successfully walks upon a "granted path." (140) In fact, it seems as though the suitors are all that hinders Telemachos from reaching his true, adult self.

The presence of the suitors and the chaos they bring more than anything emphasizes the absence of a father figure for Telemachos. Homer begins with the situation on Ithaca rather than the predicament of Odysseus to show that, due to the absence of Odysseus, chaos and disorder reign free. For nearly four years, Penelope's suitors gobble up Odysseus' food and guzzle his wine while they wait for her to choose one of them. The conduct of the suitors in Odysseus' house violates the rules governing feasting and hospitality, making it very difficult for Telemachos to receive other guests. (Thalmann, 36) Thus, in Book I, Telemachos must offer hospitality to the disguised Athena in a corner of the hall. The "civilized order has been overthrown" and "the hierarcical structure of the house is weak in the absence of anyone to fill the position at the top." (Thalmann, 34-35) The absence of the poem's hero has also left a void in the political system. (35) No assembly has been held since Odysseus left for Troy twenty years earlier. An assembly is called by Telemachos in which he gives the suitors public orders to leave his house. But Telemachos' attempts to assert his authority in the house are met with ridicule by the suitors. These opening books show not only the impatience of Telemachos to gain his inheritance (31) but also the urgent "need for Odysseus to return and restore order." (34-35)

The presence of the suitors aggravates the natural difficulty of Telemachos' transition from childhood to adulthood. (Thalmann, 38) He sees himself as powerless:

...We have no man here
such as Odysseus was, to drive this curse
from the household, [he says].
We ourselves are not the men to do it; we must be
weaklings in such a case, not men well seasoned in
battle.
I would defend myself if the power were in me.
(II. 58-62)

Athena begins to help Telemachos by putting courage in his heart to undertake the journey to search for news of his father:

Telemachos, you are to be no thoughtless man, no
coward,
if truly the strong force of your father is instilled
in you;
such a man he was for accomplishing word and
action...
there is some hope that you can bring all these
things to fulfillment. (II. 270-80)

Athena's gift of courage makes Telemachos more confident. She knows that Telemachos needs to make this journey not only for his own self-esteem, but to make men everywhere think highly of him. (Hamilton, 295) His father's fame is already widely known; now it is Telemachos' turn. Looking for his father will prove to others what has already been established in the poem: that he is a young man with admirable filial piety. (295)

The young generation carries on the reputation of the family and also determines the stability of social institutions. (Thalmann, 37) Homer realizes this, and chooses to use Telemachos as the ideal. As Telemachos dresses before leaving to search for news of his father, the poet creates a contrast between "his manly sword and spear [and] the two dogs, substitutes for grown-people's followers..." (Finley, 157) The image of Telemachos is one of pure, hopeful potential.

If Telemachos has a counterpart in the *Odyssey*, it is Nausicaa, the daughter of Alcinous and Arete in Scheria. Both are young and coming of age. Both Telemachos and Nausicaa are making the crucial jump from childhood into adulthood. Nausicaa seems to be on the receiving end of similar gifts from Athena, such as courage and the powerful gift of words.

The proof of this comes even before she displays her eloquence to Odysseus. In fact, at the start of Book Six, Athena awakens Nausicaa from her sleep:

Nausicaa, how could your mother have a child so
careless?
The shining clothes are lying away uncared for,
while your
marriage is not far off, when you should be in
your glory
for clothes to wear...
It is from such things that a good reputation
among people
springs up, giving pleasure to your father and the
lady your mother.
So let us go on a washing tomorrow when dawn
shows. I too
will go along with you and help you, so you can
have all
done most quickly, since you will not long stay
unmarried. (Lines 25-33)

The reader will recall Athena's proposed visit to Telemachos in Book I when she states her purpose to the assembled gods: "I may...put some confidence in him...and I will convey him into Sparta and to sandy Pylos to ask after his dear father's homecoming, if he can hear something, and so that among people he may win a good reputation." (Lines 88-95)

One of Homer's goals does seem to be to prove that Telemachos is indeed worthy of the legendary reputation of the men before him. A way that Homer shows this is by making references to how Telemachos is becoming like his father in some very important ways. But there are also some very important differences. Telemachos cannot be called a carbon copy of his father. There is a reckless, urgent quality about him which makes his youth hard to hide. (Dimock, 200) The reader of the poem should not be lulled into the "chip-off-the-old-block" idea, but should instead appreciate each character

for his or her unique traits, for it is this convincing individuality that makes Homer's poem so great.

In physical appearance and some parts of personality, Odysseus and Telemachos are very similar. Menelaus and Helen weep over how closely Telemachos resembles his father. (Book IV) Nestor praises Telemachos' eloquent speech and how similar it is to that of Odysseus; he also says, "If only gray-eyed Athene would deign to love you, as in / those days she used so to take care of glorious Odysseus / in the Trojan country... / for I never saw the gods showing such open affection / as Pallas Athene, the way she stood beside him, openly." (III. 218-222) Athena indeed favors Telemachos, and it is crucial to his development that he hear such praise, especially from men like Nestor and Menelaus, who fought alongside his father in the Trojan War. When Telemachos hears that he is so much like his father, who is considered so brave, so wise, so well-known and loved, it is a huge boost for his ego. He needs to hear these words now, at this critical time in his life.

Another gift Telemachos shares in common with his father is the gift of words, but they differ in their usage of it. Telemachos uses a more direct manner of speaking to accomplish his goals than does his smooth-talking father (recall the exchange between Odysseus and Athena on Ithaca in Book XIII). When Telemachos reproaches his mother about the singer, Penelope is stunned at his talking back for the first time:

Why, my mother, do you begrudge this excellent
singer
his pleasing himself as the thought drives him?
It is not the singers
who are to blame, it must be Zeus is to blame...
So let your heart and let your spirit be hardened to
listen.
Odysseus is not the only one who lost his

homecoming
day at Troy. There were many others who perished,
besides him.
Go therefore back in the house, and take up your own
work...
For mine is the power in this household. (I. 346-59)

It is interesting to note that, just previous to this exchange, the disguised Athena had spoken to Telemachos and put strength and courage into his heart, making him capable of disagreement with his mother in a very important way: "You should not go on / clinging to your childhood. You are no longer of an age to do that." (I. 296-97)

Also, when Telemachos speaks to the suitors, they are amazed that Telemachos would speak in such a daring way to them. He tells them that "...I will be the absolute lord over my own household / and my servants, whom the great Odysseus won by force for me." (I. 397-98) It is a declaration of his unwillingness to see the barbarity of the suitors continue; his statement may even be taken as a declaration of war upon them.

As mentioned before, Telemachos is similar to Odysseus in appearance, personality, and eloquence. But the major similarity is in the journey he makes, although it is "a smaller-scale version of [his father's] and, thanks to Athena, one without genuine danger." (Thalmann, 40) There is a single, important difference in their respective journeys, however: Telemachos journeys outward, away from home; he leaves just as his father is returning. Telemachos learns to use his gift of words as he journeys out into the new to obtain what Odysseus already possesses--*metis*, or wisdom. Odysseus' gift has been tested multiple times, and he returns to the old life he left behind. Significantly, the journeys of father and son fuse mid-way in the poem; Telemachos is continuing the legacy of adventures that Odysseus has begun. His journey is a formation of character--an important first step. "The contrast between aspiring youth and accomplished maturity

can hardly be expressed more powerfully or economically than through these movements in opposite directions.” (40) The son's journey frames that of the father. (Dimock, 201)

Telemachos gains self-confidence on his journey, and "in mood and mind he has entered another world..." (Finley, 146) This is Athena's doing--she wants him to see both the dangers and the possibilities of the great world. (145) His journey to Pylos and Sparta is important not only for his own self-image, but for the image he presents to others. The broadening of horizons is what first tests Telemachos; he "leaves the nest" of Ithaca and sees all that he can do in the world.

Telemachos' journeys also serve as warm-up exercises for the challenge that awaits him at home--facing the suitors. He must be willing to die for his father and his own rightful place as his father's successor. While Odysseus has faced death numerous times, Telemachos has not. Athena gives Telemachos the courage and determination to face his destiny:

I myself would rather first have gone through
many hardships
and then come home, and look upon my day of
returning,
than come home and be killed at my own hearth...
But death is a thing that comes to all alike. Not
even
the gods can fend it away from a man they love,
when once
the destructive doom of leveling death has
fastened upon him. (III. 232-38)

The goddess is not simply speaking about the returning of Odysseus. She is giving Telemachos a gift of wisdom (in words) that his own father will live out (in physical reality), and that Telemachos himself may need someday: *Be willing to face death if you believe in something with all of your heart.* In helping his father carry out the plan to slay

the suitors, Telemachos is living out his own part of *Athena's* plans for both father and son.

However, Athena does not give Telemachos a guarantee that his life will be spared. He must act on her advice in good faith; this is where Telemachos' faith is ultimately tested. Athena does divert the aims of the suitors' weapons (XXII. 255), but Telemachos and his father are kept ignorant of her involvement in this.

There are two important moments where the reader knows that Telemachos' development is nearly complete. One occurs during the archery contest; the other when the kinsmen of the suitors plot revenge. It is significant that Penelope thinks of the archery contest upon her disguised husband's return. It is a supreme battle of skilled individuals fighting for her hand. Telemachos is allowed to go first in the stringing of his father's bow. It seems that Homer has considered the possible Oedipal implications in the case of Telemachos' success. He would, in a sense, be winning the hand of his own mother. Not only is this taboo in the sexual sense, but also in the social sense: It is impossible for Telemachos to *replace* his father in terms of interpersonal relationships such as friendship or marriage.

Homer reassures his readers that Telemachos understands this socially important idea. As he makes three attempts to string his father's bow, he nearly succeeds on the fourth try. But at a signal from his father, he stands down. This is a crucial moment, because it means that Telemachos has finally become his father's *equal* (not *replacement*). Telemachos can rival the great Odysseus. But he is not a threat to his father, even if it is only because he wisely accepts a subordinate position. (Thalman, 117)

It is Telemachos who, as host, sees to it that his "beggarly guest" gets the next chance to string the bow. It slowly dawns on the reader that Odysseus' fate to some extent now depends on Telemachos' handling of this complex and difficult situation. Telemachos learns to hold his ground in front of the suitors "on behalf of the guest stranger [his father], and it is this that places Odysseus in the position to deal with the Suitors." (Thornton, 77) This showdown is the climax in Telemachos' development into a hero. (77) "Telemachos has truly learned to be a 'host of strangers'; and that means...that he has now the mind of a king." (76)

As if to support this claim, Homer adds a section to his poem concerning the kinsmen of the suitors plotting revenge. This is a further test for Telemachos. Odysseus says to his son: "Telemachos, now yourself being present, where men do battle, / and the bravest are singled out from the rest, you must be certain / not to shame the blood of your fathers, for we in time past / all across the world have surpassed in manhood and valor." (XXIV. 506-09) But Telemachos already understands this; he has passed enough tests throughout the course of the poem, and comprehends the importance of the coming battle. His youthful and self-assertive reply: "You will see, dear father, if you wish, that as far as my will goes, / I will not shame my blood that comes from you, which you speak of." (Lines 511-12)

While he may continue in the same vein as the men before him in being a respectable, eloquent ruler, "[Telemachos] is on his way toward a final poise that is never quite his father's." (Finley, 141) He has made the first step of his *own* Odyssey. His will be filled with new and different challenges. And Athena will guide him through it,

making the “obstacles” into opportunities to solidify his own reputation as a warrior and as a hero.

The End?

In Lord Alfred Tennyson's famous poem, Ulysses leaves "the scepter and the isle" (line 34) of Ithaca, as well as the work of "subduing" the people, to Telemachos, who has graduated into manhood. Telemachos, we are told, is worthy of Ulysses' trust: "He works his work," Ulysses says in line 43, "I mine." This abdication leaves Ulysses free to pursue that which he truly desires—learning, gaining any experience he can through travelling.

Because Ulysses was "always roaming with a hungry heart," (line 12) he has seen and learned much, and says "I am a part of all that I have met." (Line 18) There is a part of Ulysses that will never be reconciled to the docile, dutiful life that he has now on Ithaca. Mere *remembrances* of his experiences aren't enough:

all experience is an arch wherethro'
Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades
For ever and forever when I move." (Lines 19-21)

Rather than settling for a dull life on Ithaca, Ulysses embarks once more on a grand voyage, taking his old mariner companions with him. It is significant that Tennyson resurrects Ulysses' fellow shipmates in this poem; only old friends, who have been through the same adventures, could possibly understand Ulysses' desires at this point in their lives. This is a radical change to the story, for all of Odysseus' companions had all met their deaths in the Homer. Tennyson's reinterpretation seems to suggest that a fresh, young crew would entirely miss the bittersweet yearnings of Ulysses and his friends.

Where does Tennyson get his interpretation of the *Odyssey*? He is most likely indebted to Dante for his poem. (Luce, 178) Dante's encounter with Ulysses in Canto

XXVI of the *Inferno* was the first exploration of the question "What happened to Odysseus after the *Odyssey*?" Dante's Ulysses is portrayed as an explorer concerned more with adventures than his wife or son (167):

...Neither fondness for my son, nor reverence for
my aged father, nor the due love which would have
made Penelope glad, could conquer in me the
longing that I had to gain experience of the
world, and of human vice and worth. But I put
forth on the deep open sea with one vessel only,
and with that small company which had not deserted
me... (Singleton)

This Ulysses is driven by the urge to travel, to gain knowledge, any knowledge. It is like a drug to him; the more he has, the more he wants. Even though Dante did not read Homer (not knowing Greek), he is inspired by Ulysses' reputation for (and examples of) curiosity in the *Odyssey* (such as the scene where he desired to hear the song of the Sirens). Dante adds to this basis of reputation.

Ulysses' twenty years of travel and adventures have "bitten" him with the virus of curiosity. But how much knowledge is too much? How far will he go to attain his goal?

Ulysses urges his men to accompany him on this journey. At first glance, the words he uses to rouse his men to adventure seem to be as magnificent as they are well-intended:

"O brothers," [he] said, "who
through a hundred thousand dangers have
reached the west, to this so brief vigil of our
senses that remains to us, choose not to deny
experience, following the sun, of the world
that has no people. Consider your origin: you
were not made to live as brutes, but to pursue
virtue and knowledge."

The reader may wonder: *Why is Ulysses classified as an evil counselor? These words seem innocent enough.* But Dante's *Inferno* is a Christian revision of ancient values.

Ulysses, according to Christian teachings, "abused his talent of God-given eloquence in fraudulent counsel" (Cooper, 160). What is blasphemous about the words of Ulysses is that he calls his men to sail west, through the Strait of Gibraltar—a boundary which no man was supposed to pass (Singleton, 470). "...He dies because he went beyond the bounds of ancient wisdom, ancient law...an escapade born of folly." (Cooper, 160) Ulysses himself calls this journey a "mad flight," a spur-of-the-moment decision, one which Homer's Odysseus would never take part in.

In this, Ulysses can be called a Faustian character, punished by God for his ambitious goals. Dante follows the Catholic church in teaching that there are limits to human knowledge. Consider the banishment of Adam and Eve from Eden after eating fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

So what does Dante's version of Ulysses "imply or reveal to those who wish to explore the world?" (173) He suggests that so-called research may be founded in fraud and self-deceit "that disdains the bridle of virtue." (174) Dante wants us to think before we act, to be very cautious and consider every angle of any situation before plunging ahead; to be more like Homer's Odysseus, perhaps. (Still, even Odysseus had some occasional lapses. For example, he refused to leave the premises of the cyclops' cave, resulting in the entrapment of himself and his men.)

Perhaps the restlessness inherent in the Ulysses is caused by more than boredom, more than a longing for the sea and the possibilities it holds. Whereas Homer's goal is to return Odysseus to his rightful place on his beloved Ithaca, Tennyson's goal is to show

that Ithaca is a relic of Ulysses' past, that which he has already seen and experienced.

Ithaca, the destination of Odysseus' journey, becomes an enslavement to Tennyson's Ulysses. Unlike Homer, Tennyson is not optimistic; his poem does not conclude with our war-hero reintegrating himself into a life he had left behind two decades before.

Tennyson's poem seems to prove that "one can never go home again." Boredom is a factor in causing Ulysses' restlessness, but it is the impossibility of a true homecoming and assimilation into society that drives Tennyson's Ulysses to continue his odyssey.

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